

have to carry you up the remainder of the hill," he grinned.

"*Mon Dieu!* but I'm glad I made the best part of the pilgrimage in a train and a carriage," twittered Madame. "Yet, though I dropped, I had to warn the little ones that the dear saint knew they were coming to her shrine."

"Is that what it means?"

"What else? A pity you are not a good Catholic, Monsieur Tollemache, or you might be granted a favor today."

"Oh, come, now! That's no way to convert a black Presbyterian. Tell me that Sainte Barbe will get my next picture crowned by the academy, and I'll fall on my knees with fervor."

"*Tchah!* Even a saint cannot obtain what Heaven does not allow."

Ingersoll laughed. "Mère Pitou may lose her breath; but she never loses her wit," he said. "Now I put forward a much more modest request. Most excellent Sainte Barbe, send me some mad dealer who will empty my studio at a thousand francs a canvas!"

Yvonne heard these words; yet, be it noted, she asked the saint to make her father happy, not prosperous. It was then that the bell rang a second time.

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed Madame Pitou. "The saint replies!"

"Like every magician, you achieve your effect by the simplest of contrivances—when one peeps behind the scenes," said Ingersoll. "Old Père Jean, custodian of the chapel, who will meet us at the summit, keeps a boy on guard so that all good pilgrims may be put in the right frame of mind by hearing the bell accidentally. The boy saw our girls first, and then spied us. Hence the double tolling. Now, Madame, crush me! I can see lightning in your eye."

"Mark my words, Monsieur Ingersoll, the saint will send that dealer, and he will certainly be mad, since none but a lunatic would pay a thousand francs for any picture of yours."

Ingersoll seized her free arm. "Run her up, for Heaven's sake, Tollemache!" he cried in English. "Her tongue has scarified me every day for eighteen years, and age cannot wither, nor custom stale, its infinite variety."

Laughing, struggling, crying brokenly that *ces Américains* would be the death of her, and, tripping along the while with surprising lightness of foot,—for Mère Pitou had been noted as the best dancer of the gavotte at any *pardon* held within a radius of ten miles of Pont Aven,—she was hurried to the waiting girls.

AH, that "ascal of a father of yours!" she wheezed to Yvonne, relapsing into the Breton language, as was her invariable habit when excited, either in anger or in mirth. "And this other overgrown imp! When they're beaten in argument they try to kill me. *Gars!* A nice lot I'm bringing to the holy chapel!"

"Never mind, *chère Maman*," said the girl, taking her father's place, and clasping the plump arm affectionately. "When we descend the other side of the hill you'll have them at your mercy. Then you can tell them what you really think of them."

"They know now. Artists, indeed! Acrobats, I call them! Making sport of a poor old woman! Not that I'm astonished at anything Monsieur Ingersoll does. Everybody admits that he is touched here," and she dabbed a fat finger at her glistening forehead, "or he wouldn't bury himself alive in a Brittany village; because he really has talent. But that hulking Monsieur Tollemache ought to be showing off his agility before you girls instead of lugging me up the Pilgrims' Way. *Cré nom!* When little Barbe's father—Heaven rest his soul!—met me here one fête day before we were married he wouldn't rest till he had swung himself round Sainte Barbe's tower by the shepherds' hooks; and me screaming in fright while I watched him, though bursting with pride all the time, since the other girls were well aware that he was doing it only to find out if I cared whether or not he fell and broke his neck."

"What's that?" inquired Tollemache; for Madame Pitou was speaking French again. "Where is this tower?"

"Oh, you'll shiver when you see it! You Americans eat so much beef that you can never leave the earth. That's why Frenchmen fly while you walk."

"Or run, my cabbage. You must admit that we can run."

"The good Lord gave you those long legs for some purpose, no doubt."

"Well, *Maman*, we offered our petitions. What did you ask for?" said Yvonne.

Madame flung up her hands with a woebegone cry. "May the dear saint forgive me, but the monkey chatter of those two infidels put my prayer clean out of my head!"

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed Tollemache. "This time I'll run in earnest, or I'll catch it hot and strong," and he made off.

"No harm done," said Ingersoll. "Mère Pitou has all she wants in this world, and will enter the next with pious confidence."

For once the elderly dame kept a still tongue. Like

every Breton woman, she was deeply religious, and rather given to superstition, and the momentary lapse that led her to forget a carefully thought out plea for saintly aid caused a pang of real distress.

Yvonne guessed the truth, and sympathized with her. "Father dear," she said, "promise now, this minute, that you will bring us all here again next year on Barbe's fête day, and that we shall fall on our knees while Madame offers her prayer, or she will be unhappy all day."

Ingersoll read correctly the look of reproach his daughter shot at him, and was genuinely sorry. He too understood the tribulation that had befallen his friend.

"By Jove!" he said instantly. "Better than that, though I make the promise willingly, Madame Pitou, and I must do immediate penance for our sins—she for neglect and I for irreverence—by going halfway down the hill again and toiling back."

He was by no means surprised when Mère Pitou took him at his word. Away they went, and Yvonne did not fail to grasp the meaning of her father's significant glance toward the belfry as he turned on his heel. On no account was the boy to miss the arrival of yet a third batch of pilgrims!



NOW, the belfry stood on the farther edge of a tiny plateau of rock and gorse that crowned the summit. On the left was Père Jean's cottage, with its stable and weaving shed. Among the trees in the background rose the diminutive spire of Sainte Barbe's chapel, and it was evident that the slope of the hill was precipitous, because spire and treetops, though quite near, were almost on a level with the girl's eyes. From the side of the belfry a paved causeway led to a quaintly carved and weather-beaten open-air altar, and long flights of broad steps fell thence on one hand to the door of the chapel, and on the other to the first of many paths piercing the dense woodland along the hillside.

Père Jean, as sprightly and wizened old peasant, dressed in white linen, was already chatting with Tollemache and the other two girls. The boy, thinking the avenue was clear, had gone to the cottage for a tray of picture postcards.

Yvonne followed, and sent him to his lookout with definite instructions. "Make no mistake," she said, "and we'll buy at least a franc's worth of cards later." Then she rejoined her friends.

"Yes, I've seen it done," Père Jean was saying. "Sailors were the best; but the shepherds were brave lads too. Nowadays it is forbidden by the prefect."

"Why? Were there many accidents?" inquired Tollemache.

"Oh, yes, a few. You see, it seems easy enough at the commencement; but sometimes the heart failed when the body was swinging over the cliff. It is fatal to look down."

Madeleine's shoulders were bent over a low parapet. Yvonne, leaning on her, saw that the caretaker was talking of the feat that Barbe's father had accomplished many years earlier. The altar at the end of the causeway was shielded by a squat, square tower. In its walls, about six feet above the causeway, some iron rings were visible. They hung loose; but their staples were imbedded in the masonry, and each ring was about a yard apart from its fellow. A mass of rock gave ready access to the first pair; but thenceforth the venturesome athlete who essayed the passage must swing himself in air, gripping a ring alternately in the left hand and in both hands.

On one side, the left, the tower sank only to the level of the path beneath; but a glance over the opposite parapet revealed an awesome abyss.

Madeleine shuddered when she felt Yvonne's hand.

"To think that men should be so foolish as to risk their lives in such a way!" she murmured.

"I suppose that anyone who let go was killed?" said Tollemache.

"*Mais non, M'sieu'*," Père Jean assured him. "The blessed saint would not permit that. No one was ever killed, I'm told. But the prefect has forbidden it these twenty years."

"Are the rings in good condition?"

"Certainly, *M'sieu'*. Where now does one get such iron as was made in those days?"

"Let's test some of 'em, anyhow," said Tollemache, and before the horrified girls realized what he meant he had leaped from parapet to rock, and was clinging to a couple of rings.

OH, Monsieur Tollemache!" screamed Barbe.

"Please come back, Monsieur!" cried Madeleine.

"Hi! Hi! It is forbidden by the prefect!" bellowed Père Jean.

But Yvonne, though angry and pallid with fright, only said, "Don't be stupid, Lorry. I should never have thought you would show off in that silly manner."

She spoke in English. Tollemache, gazing down at her in a comical, sidelong way, answered in the same language.

"I'm not showing off. Do you think that any Frenchman ever lived who could climb where I couldn't?"

"No one said a word about you."

"Yes. Mère Pitou said I'd shiver when I saw the place. Now watch me shiver!"

He swung outward. Even in her distress, Yvonne noticed that he took a strong pull at each ring before trusting his whole weight to it. But she made no further protest, nor uttered a sound; though Madeleine and Barbe were screaming frantically, and the old caretaker's voice cracked with reiteration of the prefect's commands.

Tollemache was soon out of sight round the angle of the tower, and the two Breton girls ran to the other parapet to watch for his reappearance. Not so Yvonne. The dread notion possessed her that she might see Laurence Tollemache dashed to his death on those cruel rocks some sixty feet beneath, and she knew that, once witnessed, the horrific spectacle would never leave her vision. So she waited spellbound in front of the altar, and gazed mutely at some tawdry images that stood there. Could they help, these grotesque caricatures of heavenly beings, carved and gilded wooden blocks with curiously inane eyes and thick lips? Her senses seemed to be atrophied. She was aware of a feeling of dull annoyance when the boy, attracted by the screams and Père Jean's shrill vehemence, came running from his post, and thus would surely miss the second appearance of her father and Mère Pitou. But the young peasant was quick witted. He had seen the "pilgrims" turn and resume the ascent; so he dashed into the belfry, because he could thence obtain a rare view of an event that he had often heard of but never seen,—a man swinging himself round Sainte Barbe's tower by the shepherds' hooks, such being the local name of the series of rings.

So the bell tolled its deep, strong notes, and simultaneously Madeleine and Barbe shrieked in a wilder pitch of frenzy. Tollemache had just swung round the second angle of the tower. His hand had caught the outermost ring on that side; but the staple yielded, and he vanished.

AH, *mon Dieu!* he has fallen!" cried Barbe, collapsing forthwith in a faint.

Fortunately Madeleine saved her from a nasty tumble on the rough stones; though she herself was nearly distraught with terror. Père Jean raced off down the right-hand flight of steps, moving with remarkable celerity for so old a man, and gasping in his panic:

"*Mille diables!* What will *M'sieu' le Préfet* say now?"

Evidently the caretaker feared lest Sainte Barbe's miraculous powers should not survive so severe a test. Yet his faith was justified. A shout was heard from the tower's hidden face.

"*Je m'en fiche de ça!*" was the cry. "I'm right as a nail. I've got to return the way I came—that's all!"

Yvonne listened as one in a dream. She saw her father and Madame Pitou crossing the plateau. For an instant her eyes dwelt on the features of the frightened boy peering through an embrasure in the belfry. From some point beneath came the broken ejaculations of Père Jean, who was craning his neck from some precarious perch on the edge of the precipice to catch a glimpse of the mad American's shattered body. Madeleine was sobbing hysterically over the prostrate Barbe, and endeavoring with nervous fingers to undo the stiff linen coil round the unconscious girl's throat.

Now, after leaving the cottage, Yvonne had looked at the chapel, the entrance to which lay at the foot of the left-hand stairway. The sanctuary had a belfry of its own, a narrow, circular tower, pierced with lancet windows beneath a pointed roof. These windows were almost on a line with and about ten feet distant from the top of the wall of rock left by the excavation that provided a site for the building. Through one of them, which faced the causeway, could be seen a tiny white